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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002002

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [IZ](#) [PGOV](#)  
SUBJECT: KRG ELECTIONS: MODEST TURNOUT AND MINOR  
IRREGULARITIES AS POLLS CLOSE

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2000  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1998

Classified By: Senior Democracy Advisor Tim Lenderking for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Overall, election observers report a calm, orderly day of voting in the Kurdistan region on July 25 with few reports of irregularities (Ref A). By midday, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) reported that voter turnout was at 37%. The number of voters increased as the day unfolded, especially after the regionwide vehicle ban was lifted at noon. Neither the Embassy nor MNF-I have received word of any election-related security problems. As evening fell, the KRG opted to extend voting by one hour, presumably to improve voter turnout. IHEC officials will have to work quickly to address complaints and tabulate tally sheets as the Kurdistan region awaits the provisional results.

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Modest Turnout, Minor Irregularities  
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[1](#)2. (U) Across the Kurdistan region, voters donned their finest national dress to cast their ballots: women wore elaborate sequined robes while men dressed in traditional olive green jumpsuits. Kurdish MPs also wore traditional dress to today's Parliament session in Baghdad. Election monitors from the U.S. Mission visited sites in Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaimaniyah and Baghdad and reported effective IHEC management of most polling places. The monitors also saw political party representatives and NGO monitors in nearly all polling centers visited.

[1](#)3. (C) Salahaddin Bahaddin, leader of the Kurdistan Islamic Union or "four party list," told RRToff that KIU found the elections to be well-run. Bahaddin reported that all polling stations were controlled by the two main parties of the Kurdistan List -- the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) or the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) -- and that these representatives were acting as "security over the process." He added that KIU had enough party observers to cover all polling stations, and that there have been no reports of harassment of KIU candidates in the past two days. KIU is in the process of filing complaints with IHEC regarding election procedures today and during Special Needs Voting on July 23 (Ref B).

[1](#)4. (SBU) In Erbil, KIU told RRT that turnout will be modest, with the highest showing in Sulaimaniyah followed by Dohuk and then Erbil. In Baghdad, a representative of KDP told Poloff that she expected 80% turnout across the KRG, and a lower turnout for KRG voters in Baghdad. Unlike voting in the three provinces of Kurdistan, U.S. monitors noted sparse turnout at Baghdad polling sites as many voters may have

traveled north to cast their ballots on the regional holiday.

(Note: IHEC is likely to release final numbers on turnout within the next 24 hours. End Note.)

15. (SBU) Reports of problems with the voter registry continued throughout the day, and RRT Erbil heard of several instances where voters were turned away from polling sites because their names were not on the voter list. In some cases, voters were able to cast a provisional ballot, but in other cases voters seemed unable to determine where to vote. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) reports additional confusion when, the night before the election, IHEC suddenly added 38 polling stations in Erbil, 38 stations in Sulaimaniyah, and removed 47 polling stations in Dohuk. NDI reports that IHEC made these changes to accommodate Special Needs Voters who were unable to participate in the special election held July 23.

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Opposition Lists Fear Fraud  
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16. (C) Change List representatives tell RRToff that they fear that the extension of the hours of the polling centers, announced late in the afternoon, was a ploy by the KDP to encourage double-voting at the days' end. RRToff also received additional reports that opposition lists opposed the extension. In addition, U.S. election monitors heard many reports that the special purple ink used by IHEC to mark voters' fingers was easy to remove, thus making double-voting easier.

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Next Steps  
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17. (C) Beginning on July 26, ballots from Special Needs Voting will be transported to Count Centers in Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimaniyah. U.S. election monitors plan to visit the Count Centers to observe that effort. At the same time, tally sheets from each of the KRG provinces will be transported to IHEC's headquarters for tabulation. U.S. monitors will check on progress at the IHEC Data Entry Center each day until the provisional results are announced.

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